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ENGLISH POETRY AND ENGLISH HISTORY

BY

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ENGLISH POETRY AND ENGLISH HISTORY

My subject is not English poetry or the history of English poetry, but the connection of English poetry with English history. What is poetry? Besides reason, of which the highest manifestation is science, man has sentiment, distinct from reason though bound to keep terms with it on pain of becoming nonsense, as it not very seldom does. Sentiment seems to imply a craving for something beyond our present state. Its supreme expression is verse, music of the mind connected with the music of the voice and ear. There is sentiment without verse, as in writers of fiction and orators; as there is verse without sentiment, in didactic poetry, for example, which Lucretius redeems from prose and sweetens, as he says himself, to our taste by the interspersion of sentimental passages. Sentiment finds its fittest expression in verse. The expression in its origin is natural and spontaneous. Then poetry becomes an art looking out for subjects to express, and sometimes looking rather far afield. So painting and sculpture, in their origin spontaneous imitation, become arts looking for conceptions to embody. We are here tracing the indications of English sentiment and character at successive epochs of the national history finding their expression in poetry.

Chaucer is the first English poet. He was preceded at least only by some faint awakenings of poetic life. It was in Anglo-Saxon that the Englishman before the Conquest chanted his song of battle with the Dane. It was in French that the troubadour or the trouvère relieved the dulness, when there was no fighting or hunting, in the lonely Norman hold. French was the language of the Plantagenets, even of Edward I, that truly English king. At last the English language rose from its serfdom shattered, adulterated, deprived of its inflections, its cognates, and its power of forming compound words, unsuited for philosophy or science, the terms for which it has to borrow from the Greek, but rich, apt for general literature, for eloquence, for song. Chaucer is the most joyous of poets. His strain is glad as that of the skylark which soars from the dewy mead to pour forth its joyance in the fresh morning air. He is at the same time thoroughly redolent of his age. In the Knight of the "Prologue" and in the tale of "Palamon and Arcite" we have that fantastic outburst of a posthumous and artificial chivalry of which Froissart is the chronicler, which gave birth to the Order of

the Garter and a number of similar fraternities with fanciful names and rules, and after playing strange and too often sanguinary pranks, as in the wicked wars with France, found its immortal satirist in the author of *Don Quixote*. In the sporting Monk, the sensual and knavish Friar, the corrupt *Sompnour*, the Pardoner with his pig's bones shown for relics, we have the Catholic church of the middle ages with its once ascetic priesthood and orders, its spiritual character lost, sunk in worldliness, sensuality, and covetousness, calling aloud for Wycliffe. At the same time in the beautiful portrait of the Good Parson we have a picture of genuine religion and an earnest of reform. Here Chaucer holds out a hand to Piers Ploughman, the poet-preacher of reform, social and religious, if poet he can be called who is the roughest of metrical pamphleteers. Chaucer's Good Parson is a figure in itself and in its connection with the history of opinion not unlike Rousseau's "Vicaire Savoyard". Close at hand is Wycliffe, and behind Wycliffe come John Ball and the terrible insurrection of the serfs. Chaucer's debt to Boccaccio and the Italian Renaissance is manifest; yet he is English and a perfect mirror of the England of his time.

There was at the same time an exuberance of national life which gave birth to ballad poetry. The English ballads as a class are no doubt inferior to the Scotch. Yet there is at least one English ballad of surpassing beauty. How can any collection of English poetry be thought complete without the ballad of "The Nut-Brown Maid?"

There follows an age unpropitious to poetry and all gentle arts. The glorious filibustering of Edward III and afterward of Henry V in France brings its punishment in a general prevalence at home of the spirit of violence, cruelty, and rapine. This, combined with aristocratic ambition and faction, plunges the country into the Wars of the Roses. At last the Tudor despotism brings calm after its kind. Helm and hauberk are changed by the court nobility for the weeds of peace, and toward the close of the reign of Henry VIII we have the twin poets Wyatt and Surrey; Surrey, the last of the tyrant's victims, produces poetry which makes him worthy to rank as a harbinger of the Elizabethan era.

The times of the Protectorate and of the Marian Reaction were dark and troublous, uncongenial to poetry. But clear enough is the connection between the springtide of national life in the Elizabethan era, and the outburst of intellectual activity, of poetry generally and especially of the drama. The worst of the storms were over. The government was firm; the religious question had been

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settled after a fashion; the energies which had been ill-spent in civil war or marauding on France were turned to maritime adventure of the most romantic kind, or if to war, to a war of national defense combined with championship of European freedom. There was everything to excite and stimulate without any feeling of insecurity.

The next great poem after Chaucer is Spenser's "Faërie Queene", and it is intimately connected with English history. It presents in allegory the struggle of Protestantism, headed by England, with Catholicism, and embodies that new Protestant chivalry which arose in place of the chivalry of the middle ages, of which Sir Philip Sydney was the model knight, and of which perhaps we see the lingering trace in Fairfax, the general of the Commonwealth, a kinsman of the Fairfax who translated Tasso. The leading characters of the struggle, Elizabeth, the Pope, Mary Queen of Scots, and Philip of Spain, under thin disguises, are all there. Artegal, the Knight of Justice, and Spenser's model of righteousness in its conflict with evil, is the Puritan Lord Grey of Wilton, the stern, ruthless Lord Deputy of Ireland, whose policy was extermination. Spenser was Lord Grey's secretary and no doubt accompanied him to the scene of his merciless government. There Spenser would come into contact with Catholicism in its lowest and coarsest as well as in its most intensely hostile form. Afterward a grantee of an estate in land conquered from the Irish insurgents, he was brought into personal conflict with the Blatant Beast. He was intimate with Raleigh and other militant and buccaneering heroes of the Protestantism of the day. In "The Shepherd's Calendar" he shows by his avowal of sympathy with old Archbishop Grindal, under the faint disguise of "Old Allgrind", who was in disgrace for countenancing the Puritans, that he belonged to the Puritan section of the divided Anglican church. Fulsome and mendacious flattery of the woman who has been allowed to give her name to this glorious age is an unpleasant feature of Spenser's work, as it is of the other works and was of the court society of that time. It is perhaps pardonable, if in any case, in that of a poet who would not be taken or expect to be taken at his word.

In the drama we expect to find rather gratification of the general love of action and excitement, and of curiosity about the doings of the great, prevalent among the people, than anything more distinctly connected with the events and politics of the day.

Shakespeare himself is too thoroughly dramatic to reflect the controversies of his time. Like all those about him he is Royalist, conforms to court sentiment, and pays his homage to the Virgin

Queen. Probably he pays it also to her learned successor under the name of Prospero in "The Tempest". Raleigh treats the Great Charter as a democratic aggression on the rights of royalty. Shakespeare in "King John" does not allude to the Great Charter or to anything connected with it. In "Coriolanus" and in "Troilus and Cressida" there is strong antidemocratic sentiment, dramatic no doubt, but also with a personal ring. It is notable that Shakespeare nowhere alludes to the great struggle with Spain. But here again he is probably in unison with the court, which though forced into the conflict, was not heartily anti-Spanish and certainly not anti-despotic. In religion Shakespeare was a Conformist. He quizzes Nonconformists, both Papist and Puritan; but probably he did no more than conform. When he touches on the mystery of existence and on the other world, as in the soliloquy in "Hamlet" and in "Measure for Measure", it is hardly in a tone of orthodox belief. In the flower-market at Rome, not very far from the shrine of Ignatius Loyola, now stands the statue of Giordano Bruno, with an inscription saying that on the spot where Bruno was burned this statue was erected to him by the age which he foresaw. Bruno visited England in Shakespeare's time, and was there the center of an intellectual circle which sat with closed doors. Was Shakespeare perchance one of that circle?

Though not political in any party sense, Shakespeare is full of the national and patriotic spirit evoked by the circumstances of his time. He shows this in the battle scene of "Henry V". He shows it in the speech of the Bastard of Falconbridge in "King John", which is at the same time a complete confutation of the theory that Shakespeare was a Catholic, for no dramatic motive could have sufficed to call forth or excuse such an affront to his own church.

No person of sense, it may be presumed, doubts that Shakespeare wrote his own plays. Greene and Ben Jonson and Charles I and Milton thought he did. But, say the Baconians, how came a yeoman's son, brought up among bumpkins, and educated at a country grammar-school, to acquire that imperial knowledge of human nature in all its varieties and ranks? This is the one strong point in their case. But Shakespeare, in London, got into an intellectual set. Several of his brother playwrights were university men. The subject of the "Sonnets" was evidently not vulgar. But much may be explained by sheer genius. Among poets, two are preëminent; one lived in the meridian light and amidst the abounding culture of the Elizabethan era; the other in the very dawn of civilization, as some think before the invention of writing, sang, a wandering minstrel, in rude Æolian or Ionian halls, and the influence of Homer on the

world's imagination, though less deep, has been wider than that of Shakespeare. Shakespeare though peerless, was not alone; perhaps he would not even have been peerless had Marlowe lived and worked, for in the last scenes of "Faust" and "Edward II" Marlowe rises to the Shakespearian height. The thoroughly national and popular character of the English drama is emphasized by contrast with the court drama of France. Unfortunately, it also shows itself in occasional adaptations to coarse tastes from which the divine Shakespeare is not free.

The remarkable connection of literary and poetic life with the life of action and adventure which marks the Elizabethan era is seen especially in the works of Sydney and Raleigh. The close of the era is pathetically marked by the death song of Raleigh. The Laudian reaction has its religious poets, George Herbert, Vaughan, and Wither; the best of whom in every sense was George Herbert, his quaint and mystical style notwithstanding. George Herbert was the poetic ancestor of the author of "The Christian Year". One who spent a day with Keble in his Hampshire vicarage might feel that he had been in the society of George Herbert. In its general character and productions the Catholic reaction in the Anglican church at the present day is as nearly as possible a repetition of that of the seventeenth century, and its ultimate tendency is the same. The only differences are that the poetry of the present movement has not the quaintness or the conceits of that of the Laudian bards and that its architecture is a revival of the medieval Gothic, whereas that of the Laudians was Palladian.

The political side of the reaction also produced its poetry, very unlike that of the religious side, poetry written by Cavaliers—

> "Our careless heads with roses bound
> Our hearts with loyal flames."

Of this school Lovelace was the best, though it was Montrose that wrote the famous lines

> "I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Lov'd I not honour more."

On the Puritan side comes one greater than all the Laudians and Cavaliers. Nothing else in poetry equals the sublimity of the first six books of "Paradise Lost". Their weak point is theological, not poetic. The hero of the piece and the object of our involuntary admiration and sympathy is the undaunted and all-daring majesty of evil. In Milton classic fancy, the culture of the Renaissance, and

even a touch of medieval romance were blended with the spiritual aspiration of the Puritan.

> "But let my due feet never fail
> To walk the studious cloysters pale,
> And love the high embowered roof,
> With antic pillars massy proof
> And storied windows richly dight
> Casting a dim religious light."

The most classic things in our language are the "Comus" and the "Samson Agonistes"; but "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained" are also cast in a classical mold.

A noble monument of the Puritan movement, though of its political rather than of its religious element, is Marvell's ode to Cromwell. Again we see the influence of the classics, which was not only literary but political and entered henceforth deeply into the political character of England.

The counterblast of Royalism to "Paradise Lost" was Butler's "Hudibras", the delight of Charles II and his courtiers, whose mental elevation may be measured thereby. It is a very poor travesty in verse of *Don Quixote*, with a Presbyterian Roundhead in place of the Don. Its principal if not its sole merits are the smart sayings of which it is a mine and its ingenious rhymes. There follows the riotous reaction of the flesh after the reign of the too-high soaring spirit under "our most religious and gracious King Charles II", as the Act of Parliament styles him. The poetry and drama native to that era are in keeping with the social life of the time and congenial to the seraglio of Whitehall. The poetry was in fact largely the work of the court set of debauchees. Dryden and Waller were originally the offspring of the bygone era and craftsmen of a higher and purer art. Both of them had written eulogies on the Protector. But if spiritual life was at a low ebb, the tide of political life was running high. It presently took the shape of a fierce and in the end sanguinary conflict between the two parties known afterward as Whigs and Tories. Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel" is the offspring of that conflict. It is about the best political satire ever written, and its excellence depends largely on its dignity and moderation; for while Shaftesbury is politically the object of attack, his judicial merits are recognized, in fact greatly overrated, and the portraiture is true. The next episode in English politics, the attempt of James II to make himself absolute and force his religion on the nation, is likewise mirrored in Dryden's verse. The poet became a sudden convert, let us hope not wholly from mercenary motives, to the court religion, and we have a singular monument of his con-

version in " The Hind and the Panther ", wherein one beast strives by a long argument in verse to persuade another beast to rest its religious faith on a pope and council. Hallam, however, is right in remarking that Dryden's special gift is the power of reasoning in verse.

We have now come to a period in which poetry most distinctly wears the character of an art. It is the period between the English Revolution and the premonitory rumblings of the great social and political earthquake which shook Europe at the end of the eighteenth century; a period of comparative calm and, generally speaking, of spiritual torpor, the Church of England dozing comfortably over her pluralities and tithes. Dryden, Pope, and Addison are not the first poets of this class; before them had been Waller, Denham, and others of whom it might clearly be said that, feeling in themselves a certain poetic faculty, they cultivated it for its own sake and for the praise or emolument which it brought. Their characteristic is skill in composition rather than height of aspiration or intensity of emotion. The greatest of them are Dryden and Pope, though Dryden was a child of the Puritan era. The most consummate artificer of all is Pope. Nothing in its way excels " The Rape of the Lock ", or indeed in its way the translation of the *Iliad*, little Homeric as the translation is. In the " Essay on Man " however and " The Universal Prayer ", which is the hymn of a free-thinker, we meet with the sceptical philosophy which was undermining the foundations of religious faith and preparing the way for the great political revolution. The inspiration is that of Pope's friend and philosophic mentor, the Voltairean Bolingbroke. Pope reflects the fashionable sentiment of the time, which in English or in Parisian salons was a light scepticism, as Horace Walpole's writings show. In a more marked and truly astounding form does the growing scepticism present itself in that tremendous poem, Swift's " Day of Judgement ". How must Voltaire have chuckled when he got into his hands lines written by a dignitary of the Anglican establishment and making the Creator of the Universe proclaim to his expectant creatures that all was a delusion and a farce! It is needless to say that Swift's works generally, including his verses, poems they can hardly be called, speak of the irreligious priest and the coming of a sceptical age.

Few now look into the minor poets of those times or read Johnson's criticism of them, the robust criticism of an unsentimental and unromantic school. Yet there is a certain pleasure in the feeling of restfulness produced by the total absence of strain. Their poetry marks the same era which is marked by Paley's theology and philoso-

phy, an era of calm before a great convulsion. In Gray and Collins we feel the growing influence of sentiment, which is one, though the mildest, of the premonitory signs of change. In Goldsmith's "Deserted Village" the social sentiment is mildly democratic.

The stream of European history is now approaching the great cataract. In England, notwithstanding Wilkes and Barré, there is no serious tendency toward political revolution. The movement there rather takes the form of religious revival, Methodism, evangelicism, social reform, and philanthropic effort. But if England had any counterpart to Rousseau, it was in Cowper, through whose "Table-Talk" with its companion essays in verse there runs a mild vein of social revolution. Nor did Cowper look with dismay or horror on the early stages of the Revolution in France. He speaks very calmly of the storming of the Bastile. He showed a distant sympathy with Burns, whose democratic sentiment

"A man's a man for a' that"

has been not the least of the sources of his immense popularity, though by his own confession he was willing to go to the West Indies as a slave-driver. We may recognize Burns as one of the foremost in the second class of poets, unsurpassed in his own line, without allowing ourselves to have his character thrust upon our sympathy. The union of high-poetic sensibility with what is low in character has been seen not in Burns only, but in Byron, in Edgar Poe, and in many others. If we are to pay homage to such a character as that of Burns because he was a great Scotch poet, why should we pay it to that paragon of pure-minded and noble-hearted gentlemen, Walter Scott?

The European crisis prepared by the teachings of Voltaire, Rousseau, and the Encyclopedists, combined with the decay of institutions and the accumulation of political abuses and ecclesiastical insincerities, had now come. It came unfortunately in an eminently excitable and impulsive nation, full of the vanity which Talleyrand notes as predominant in the Revolution. For some time, in spite of the weakness of the king, the meddlesome folly of the queen, and the demagogic eloquence of Mirabeau, fatally repelling the indispensable coöperation of the court with the Assembly, matters went pretty well. But at last, through a series of disastrous accidents and blunders, the Revolution fell into the hands of the vile mob of Paris and its Terrorist chiefs. Nobody could be blamed for being hopeful and sympathetic at first or despondent and dispirited after the September massacres.

Poetic natures, such as those of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey, at first were naturally fired with enthusiasm and hope.

> "O pleasant exercise of hope and joy!
> For mighty were the auxiliars which then stood
> Upon our side, we who were strong in love!
> Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
> But to be young was very heaven! — O times
> In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
> Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
> The attraction of a country in romance!
> When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights,
> When most intent on making of herself
> A prime Enchantress — to assist the work,
> Which then was going forward in her name."

In Coleridge, the great Pantisocrat, rather curiously, the recoil seems to have come first. Before Wordsworth and Southey, he had discovered that

> "The Sensual and the Dark rebel in vain,
> Slaves by their own compulsion! In mad game
> They burst their manacles and wear the name
> Of Freedom, graven on a heavier chain!"

He presently became a most philosophic hierophant of orthodox politics and of the doctrine of the established church. In his peculiar way, in fact, he may be said to be about the greatest of Anglican divines. Wordsworth, it is needless to say, presently shared the recoil. The spirit of his poetry, whenever he touches on institutions, civil or religious, is thoroughly conservative. On the other hand, neither of these two men can be said to have turned Tory. They simply fell back on attachment to the national polity and principles. The French Revolution had ended naturally by giving birth to a military despot and conqueror, the struggle against whom was a strugle for the liberty of all nations. Southey became more decidedly Tory, and though he was one of the best and most amiable of men, drew upon himself Whig hatred and abuse. He lives chiefly by his *Life of Nelson*. Yet he is no mean poet. "The Curse of Kehama" is a splendid piece, full of the gorgeous imagery and the fantastic mythology of the East. Kehama, the impious rajah, whose career of insatiable ambition, after conquering earth and storming heaven, ends in his plucking on himself a miserable doom, is evidently Napoleon, whom as the arch-enemy of his kind, Southey regarded with the intense and righteous detestation, vented in the spirited ode on the negotiations with Bonaparte.

On the other side, we have in different lines Byron, Shelley, and Tom Moore. Keats may perhaps be regarded as one of the circle, though he wrote nothing distinctly in that sense. Byron is perhaps

more European than English. He left England at an early age, and though he revisited it did not settle, but spent the rest of his life mainly in Italy. Still more was he idiosyncratic. The self-presentation and self-worship which fill his poems are unparalleled, and considering the character of the man who thus pours out upon us his lacerated feelings and sentimental woes, one finds it difficult now to read the first cantos at all events of "Childe Harold" with much respect or pleasure. But the novelty of Byronism, its attractions for weak egotism, and the poetic dress which the writer's unquestionable genius gave it, helped perhaps in some measure by his rank and his personal beauty, made it the rage of the hour. As an Englishman, Byron was not a political revolutionist; in fact he always remained an aristocrat; but he was a social iconoclast. His great work, as his admirers probably say with truth, is "Don Juan", with its affected cynicism and unaffected lubricity. Macaulay sneers at British morality for its condemnation of Byron. British morality may be prudish, fitful, and sometimes hollow. But it has guarded the family and all that depends thereon, as Byron had good reason to know. Italian morality, however poetic, did not.

The connection of Shelley is rather with European history than with the history of England, though he could not shake himself free from the influences, attractive and repulsive, of his birthplace. His interest in the French Revolution is proclaimed in the opening of "The Revolt of Islam" and makes itself felt generally through the poem. A revolutionist Shelley was with a vengeance in every line, religious, political, social, moral, matrimonial, and even dietetic, wanting us to be vegetarians and marry our sisters. He was in fact an anarchist, though as far as possible from being a dynamiter; resembling the gentle Kropotkin of our day, who believes that we should all be good and happy if we would only do away with the police. It is curious to see the story of Prometheus, the great rebel against the tyrant of the universe, half written by Æschylus and finished in the same spirit, after the lapse of all those centuries, by Shelley. An Anglican college could not in those days help expelling a rampant propagator of atheism, though it has now adopted his memory and built him a strange and incongruous shrine within its courts. Nor could Eldon, as the legal guardian of the interests of Shelley's children, have left them in the hands of a father who would have brought them up to social ruin. Shelley, however, like Rousseau, was cosmopolitan. He withdrew from English citizenship to spend the rest of his days in Italy. Moreover, he was a being as intensely poetic and as little allied to earth in any way as his own skylark. He is not the first of poets in mental power, but he is, it

seems to me, the most purely and intensely poetic. What could lead my friend Matthew Arnold to disrate Shelley's poetry and put it below his letters, I never could understand. "A beautiful but ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain"; such was Arnold's description of Shelley, and true it is that so far as any practical results of his poetic preaching were concerned, the angel did beat his wings in vain; but if he was luminous and beautiful, he fulfilled the idea of a poet.

Tom Moore clearly belongs to the history of his age. He is the bard of the Whigs in their fight with the Tory government, and of his native Ireland, then struggling for emancipation. He is a thorough Irishman with all the lightness and brilliancy of his race, with all its fun and with all its pathos. The pathos we have in "Paradise and the Peri", as well as in "Irish Melodies". The fun takes largely the form of political satire. Very good the satire is, though like almost all satire and caricature, it loses a part of its pungency by lapse of time. To enjoy it thoroughly you must have lived at least near to the days of the Regency, Eldon, Castlereagh, and Sidmouth.

On the other side we have Walter Scott. When he is named we think of the incomparable writer of fiction rather than of the poet. Yet surely the writer of "Marmion", of the introduction to "Marmion", and of the lyrical pieces interspersed in the tales, deserves a place, and a high place, among poets. Is not "Marmion" a noble piece and the most truly epic thing in our language, besides being most interesting as a tale? Scott is claimed politically and ecclesiastically by the party of reaction. It is said that he turned the eyes of his generation back from the sceptical and revolutionary present to the reverent and chivalrous past. He has even been cited as the harbinger of Ritualism. The romance, of which he was the wizard, certainly instils love of the past. So far he did belong to the reaction. But his motive was never political or ecclesiastical. Of ecclesiasticism there was nothing about him. He delighted in ruined abbeys, but a boon companion was to him "worth all the Bernardan brood who ever wore frock or hood". A Tory, and an ardent Tory, he was. An intense patriot he was in the struggle with revolutionary France and her emperor. A worshiper of monarchy he was, devout enough to adore George IV, but he was above all things a great artist, perfectly impartial in his choice of subjects for his art. Welcome alike to him were Tory and Whig, Cavalier and Roundhead, Jacobite and Covenanter, if they could furnish him with character. Happily for his readers, he never preaches, as some novelists do; yet we learn from him historical toleration and breadth of view, while we are

always imbibing the sentiments of a genial, high-minded, and altogether noble gentleman.

We must not forget Crabbe, who though as far as possible from being revolutionary, perhaps instils a slightly democratic sentiment by cultivating our social interest in the poor. Ebenezer Elliott, the author of the "Corn-Law Rhymes" and no mean poet, is a bard of the liberal movement and especially of free trade. Unless he was greatly mistaken, there can be no doubt about the source of industrial misery in his day.

Tennyson has been called a great teacher. The name is inappropriate, as any one who had known the man would feel. He was one of the greatest of poets, almost unrivaled in beauty of language and in melody. But he had nothing definite to teach. With fixed opinions he could not have been so perfectly as he was the mirror of intellectual society in his age. "There is more faith in honest doubt than in half the creeds." "There's something in this world amiss will be unriddled by and by." That was his mental attitude, and it was perfectly characteristic of a time in which old beliefs were passing away and new beliefs had not yet been formed; an age of vague spiritual hopes and yearnings, such as glimmer in "In Memoriam" and wherever Tennyson touches the subjects of God and religion and the mystery of being. In this sense his poetry is a chapter in the general history of the English mind. We see at the same time in his poems the advance of science, to which with consummate art he lends a poetic form. The revolt of woman is playfully treated in "The Princess". Reaction against the prevalent commercialism and materialism finds expression in the chivalrous "Idylls of the King". Tennyson is intensely patriotic and even militarist, though a man could not be imagined less likely to be found on a field of battle. In this also he represents an eddy in the current of national sentiment. In the well-known passage in "Maud" welcoming the Crimean War he thoroughly identified himself with English history, though he lived, like Lord Salisbury, to find that he had laid his money on the wrong horse.

The names of Aubrey de Vere and Frederick Faber on one side, those of Swinburne and Mrs. Barrett Browning on the other, show that English poetry has been lending its lyre to the expression of all the different sentiments, ecclesiastical, political, and social, of an age full of life and conflict. But the connection is rather with European than with English history. Matthew Arnold is the arch-connoisseur and general censor, appreciating all varieties and regulating them by his taste rather than connecting himself with anything national or special, unless it be the spirit of free thought which was consuming

England in his day. His poetry is simply high art. Of Browning I fear to speak. His charac ristic poems do not give me pleasure of that sort which it is supposed to be the special function of poetry to give. He is a philosopher in verse with Browning societies to interpret his philosophy. He, again, symbolizes the general tendencies of an age, rather than any special period or phase of English history.

We seem now to have come to a break in the life of poetry in England and elsewhere; let us hope not to its close. There are good writers, Mr. Watson, for example. Swinburne with his revolutionary fervor is still with us. Edwin Arnold with his singular command of luscious language has only just left us. But neither in England nor anywhere else does there appear to be a great poet. Imagination has taken refuge in the novels, of which there is a deluge, though among them, George Eliot in her peculiar line excepted, there is not the rival of Miss Austen, Walter Scott, Thackeray, or Dickens. The phenomenon appears to be common to Europe in general. Is science killing poetic feeling? Darwin owns that he had entirely lost all taste for poetry, and not only for poetry but for anything esthetic. Yet Tennyson seems to have shown that science itself has a sentiment of its own and one capable of poetic presentation. Ours is manifestly an age of transition. Of what it is the precursor an old man is not likely to see.

GOLDWIN SMITH.